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HEARD IN THE HALLS

Image precedes us

Jim Bernhard, CEO of the Shaw Group and former chairman of the Louisiana Democratic Party, came to the Capitol on Wednesday to advocate that lawmakers require more detailed personal financial disclosures of themselves and other elected officials. He echoed a familiar theme of ethics-overhaul activists: that disclosure is a key to improving the Bayou State's reputation for shady dealings. Louisiana's "negative image" outside the state "is a huge factor in companies staying here and coming here," Bernhard told the Senate and Governmental Affairs Committee. He specifically noted Louisiana's runner-up finish in the recruitment of a new American steel plant to be opened by the ThyssenKrupp Group of Germany. "Don't think our reputation didn't have at least some part in the decision," Bernhard said. Sen. Rob Marionneaux Jr., D-Livonia, answered with a nod to a recent legislative melee in the winning state: "And they went to Alabama where they were fist-fighting in the Senate last week." Undeterred, Bernhard shot back, "Can you imagine what (ThyssenKrupp officials) think of us if they chose that."